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Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

2.40

**I = Interviewer; D = David Stiles**

**I:** Thirty years ago, the idea of getting a worker to hand wash your car would have been unthinkable – except to the very rich. Either you washed it yourself at home on a Sunday morning or you took it down to the automatic carwash at your local garage. Nowadays, you can have it washed inside and out by a team of willing and capable workers for as little as £6. So, what’s changed? I have here with me David Stiles, author of *The Servant Economy*. David, are we just getting too lazy to do our own domestic chores or is this part of some new economic phenomenon?

**D:** Well, first of all hello and thanks for inviting me onto your programme … um so, yes in answer to your question, it’s said that in Britain today there are more workers doing domestic jobs than there were in the 19th century – um … perhaps as many as two million: gardeners, nannies etcetera. And this is a direct consequence of globalisation and the freeing up of the labour market. You see, many of these workers are migrants – in the case of Britain mostly Eastern Europeans. Umm and I think that in capitalist economies, at any rate, the richer classes will always provide employment for the poorer classes. As the Victorian satirist Hilaire Belloc famously said, ‘it is the duty of the wealthy man to give employment to the artisan’.

**I:** Yes, … but that’s the point, isn’t it? A 19th-century style servant economy actually emphasises the inequalities between rich and poor in a society.

**D:** Well, hmm … yes, it can do, but it also creates employment. You don’t have to be especially rich to have a cleaner come once a week and tidy your house. Quite a lot of working people do that. A lot of so-called ordinary people get their windows cleaned every few months. But there are some – er … rich – people who get it into their heads that they’re too busy or important to do any domestic chores. So they’ll hire a personal shopper, and have someone walk their dog every day. If they’re having a party at home, they’ll get an outside catering company to prepare the food. I know some people who even have their Christmas tree installed in their living room and then decorated for them. That really *is* a statement of wealth.

Life

**I:** Hmm … it seems more a statement of confused priorities to me. Walking the dog and decorating the Christmas tree are supposed to be a pleasure, aren’t they?

**D:** Mmm … of course, they are. But look at it another way … these are all things that create employment. As long as staff are treated well – you know, as employees, not as servants –and are fairly paid and their skills are valued, just as you would show respect to your hairdresser when you get your hair cut, then I don’t see a problem.